

# The Polydox Confederation

by Alvin J. Reines

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*In a polydoxy, since each person determines her or his own belief and practice, we find a variety of views regarding such religious and philosophic themes as the meaning or lack of meaning of the word God, the existence or nonexistence of an afterlife, the nature of morality, the nature of festivals and services, and the like. The varied beliefs and practices allowed and affirmed by a polydoxy are the sources of its name: (Greek) poly, "many"; doxa, "opinion."*

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## **Definitions**

Polydoxy is a religious or philosophy-of-life ideology whose essential principle is that every person possesses an inherent right to ultimate self-authority over her or his psyche and body. This principle will be referred to as the "Polydox Principle." Accordingly, every person possesses an ultimate right to determine the religious or philosophic beliefs she or he will accept, the observances she or he will keep, and the morality she or he will follow.

A polydox community is one in which persons come together in a formal relationship to pursue in association with one another their commitment to the Polydox Principle. The basic structure of a polydox community can be defined in terms of a covenant that is named the "Freedom Covenant." A person who is party to the Freedom Covenant pledges to affirm and respect the ultimate right to self-authority of every other party to the covenant in return for the other parties' pledges to affirm and respect her or his own. A corollary of the Freedom Covenant is that each party's freedom ends where the other parties' freedom begins. Membership in a polydox community con-

sists in entering into the Freedom Covenant of the community.

Polydoxy is counterposed to an orthodox religion or philosophy of life. An orthodoxy lays down, as constituting the only true doctrine and righteous behavior, a rigid, single set of theological or metaphysical beliefs, moral practices, and ritual observances that an authority designated by the orthodoxy compels its adherents to follow. The nature of orthodoxy is pointed to by its etymology: (Greek) *orthos*, meaning "true"; and *doxa*, "opinion." An orthodoxy, according to its adherents, sets forth the only true opinion that exists regarding doctrine and behavior. In a polydoxy, the sole obligation required of its adherents is that they affirm the Polydox Principle and fulfill their Freedom Covenant pledge to affirm and respect the inherent right of others to ultimate self-authority. Accordingly, in a polydoxy, since each person determines her or his own belief and practice, we find a variety of views regarding such religious and philosophic themes as the meaning or lack of meaning of the word *God*, the existence or nonexistence of an afterlife, the nature of morality, the nature of festivals and services, and the like. The varied beliefs and practices allowed and affirmed by a polydoxy are the sources of its name: (Greek) *poly*, "many"; *doxa*, "opinion."

Polydoxy is also to be distinguished from democracy; the former is the ideology of a religious or philosophy-of-life community, the latter is the political ideology of a state. A democracy such as exists in America, where there is a separation of church and state, is compatible with both polydox and orthodox communities. Thus a person is free in America to take the right to exercise religious or philosophic authority over oneself that the state grants and use it to join an orthodox community where she or he then surrenders that right to some hierarchy. On the other hand, a person can choose to join a polydox community and retain the right to religious or philosophic self-authority that the state grants.

### **The Present Polydox Situation**

The term *polydoxy*, and the articulation of the polydox system summarized here, has appeared only in the last twenty-five years. Still, the Polydox Principle, that persons possess an inherent right to ultimate religious or philosophy-of-life self-authority that no religious community, let alone a state, can abrogate, has long been in the minds and hearts of many persons, however inchoate their formulations may have been. The ranks of these persons, or polydoxians, have from all appearances greatly increased in the present, and they come from almost all the major religious cultures and communities of the Western world. Hence we find polydox Unitarian Universalists, polydox Christians, polydox Jews, and polydox humanists. We cannot here enter into a historical analysis of the reasons for the emergence of polydoxians from these various religious cultures and communities in recent times except to say that economic (as: affluence and the dominance of capitalism), political (as:

the separation of church and state), and ideological (as: the success of naturalistic theoretical and applied knowledge in science and technology) conditions in the modern Western world have all contributed significantly to it. The absence of similar economic, political, and ideological development is undoubtedly the reason that we do not find polydoxians in Islamic countries and the third world generally.

We will now list and briefly characterize the five major categories of polydoxians that exist at present.

*Polydox Unitarian Universalists:* persons who affirm the Polydox Principle, who wish to have the name Unitarian Universalist, and who generally are members of a Unitarian Universalist church or fellowship. Polydox Unitarian Universalists pursue polydoxy within the interpersonal relations of the Unitarian Universalist community where individual freedom is an established tradition, and through Unitarian Universalist festivals and rituals, which although they have no fixed form do often contain some vestiges of Judeo-Christian origins, if only by virtue of their names and dates of celebration.

*Polydox Christians:* persons who affirm the Polydox Principle, and who wish to have the name Christian. Polydox Christians may or may not belong to Christian churches. At times, polydox Christians may ascribe a special status to Jesus, whether natural (as: “the wisest teacher” or “the greatest moralist”) or supernatural (as: “a person of the Trinitarian Godhead,” “son of God,” or “Messiah”). In addition, polydox Christians, when they observe religious festivals and rituals, are apt to celebrate those that clearly have their source in traditional Christianity but that they often demythologize or otherwise transform to a significant degree.

*Polydox Jews:* persons who affirm the Polydox Principle and who wish to have the name Jew. Polydox Jews may or may not belong to temples or synagogues, although a substantial number are affiliated with Reform Jewish institutions, and are known as polydox Reform Jews. Polydox Jews generally make a deliberate effort to create their festivals, rituals, and liturgy so that they show a recognizable relationship to those of the Jewish past. To meet polydox needs, however, this generally requires the essential transformation of past Jewish usage, particularly demythologization.

*Polydox Humanists:* persons who affirm the Polydox Principle, and who wish to have the name polydox humanist. Polydox humanists generally stress a way of life that centers on human interests and values; many subscribe to a non-theistic, rationalist belief that maintains humans are capable of attaining a meaningful and moral life without recourse to supernaturalism.

*Polydox Adherents:* persons who affirm the Polydox Principle, who wish to have the name polydox adherent, and who do not wish to have a historical ideological name such as Unitarian Universalist, Christian, Jew, or humanist. Festivals, rituals, and liturgy of polydox adherents have, on principle, no relation or association with those that are distinctive to any historical religion.

*Polydoxians:* designates persons who affirm the Polydox Principle and in-

cludes, therefore, all of the categories described above.

### **The Polydox Confederation**

Polydoxians, in addition to affirming the Polydox Principle may, and usually do, hold additional beliefs, values, and practices. These additional beliefs, values, and practices are, however, logically subordinate to the Polydox Principle, which constitutes, therefore, the fundamental belief of every polydoxian. The reason for this is that once a person accepts the Polydox Principle—that she or he possesses ultimate self-authority—all other beliefs, values, and practices of the person are dependent upon her or his accepting them by an act of self-authority. Accordingly, all polydoxians share the same fundamental belief, whether they are polydox Unitarian Universalists, polydox Christians, polydox Jews, polydox humanists, or polydox adherents. Ordinarily, we call those who share the same fundamental belief coreligionists or cobelievers. Moreover, we would expect to find them in the same community, where they can enter into the creative, constructive, and supportive relations that those who share the same fundamental principle are able to enjoy. Unfortunately, most polydoxians are not aware that the others exist, let alone share a sense of community with them. This being the case, the Polydox Confederation has been established to serve such purposes as the following:

1. To bring polydoxians from historically separated religious or ideological cultures and communities to an awareness of each other's existence.
2. To overcome the unfounded historical separation of Polydoxians from one another by imbuing them with a sense of membership in the same ideological community. This is the Grand Historical Synthesis, a coming together of polydox Unitarian Universalists, polydox Christians, polydox Jews, polydox humanists, and polydox adherents. Individuals or groups, such as fellowships, churches and temples, are eligible to join the Polydox Confederation. All individuals or groups retain their particular names upon joining the confederation: polydox Unitarian Universalists retain the name Unitarian Universalist, polydox Christians the name Christian, and so on.

The Polydox Confederation does not serve as a local congregation; it works for the over-all polydox community. This is exemplified by the festivals the Polydox Confederation has produced. All polydoxians can, in principle, jointly participate in these festivals—which celebrate polydox and universal human concerns and contain no elements related to the distinctive festivals and rituals of present religions. Five festivals have thus far been created by the Polydox Confederation: the Festival of Affirmation, c. December 22 (Winter Solstice), and for eleven days thereafter, for those who wish (culminating on New Year's Eve); the Festival of Hope, c. February 4 (Midwinter); the Festival of Creative Freedom, c. March 21 (Spring Equinox); the Festival of Illumination, c. June 22 (Summer Solstice); the Festival of Renewal, c. September 23 (Fall Equinox).

We who are committed to the goals of the Polydox Confederation are aware of the awesome immensity of the task that lies ahead. Yet the moral challenge to realize the ideal of the Grand Historical Synthesis is irresistible, for it is as noble and important in its aim as it is unique and significant in the annals of humankind.

*Editor's note: For further information about the Polydox Confederation write that association at: P.O. Box 20044, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220-2488.*

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